

Lexington Center

Analysis of Economic Conditions and Recommendations



Lexington, Massachusetts

Prepared for and in Collaboration with: Lexington Economic Development Office
and the Lexington Center Committee

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Associates LLC

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Contents

Project Purpose, Process and Study Area	5
--	----------

Part I.

Business District Profile and Commercial Mix Analysis.....	6
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- A. Real Estate Overview
- B. Establishment Characteristics
- C. Business District Composition Assessment
- D. Comparative Business Mix Analysis

Part II.

Business Conditions, Business Satisfaction & Input Concerning Future Actions.....	19
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- A. Business Conditions
- B. Business Satisfaction
- C. Business Input Concerning Potential Future Actions
- D. Other Input Regarding Factors Inhibiting Small Businesses from Locating/Thriving in the Center

Part III.

Community Profile, Consumer Patterns, Preferences & Input Concerning Future Actions....	27
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- A. Community Profile
- B. Consumer Patterns
- C. Consumer Satisfaction and Preferences
- D. Consumer Input Concerning Potential Future Actions

Part IV.

Summary of Proposed Goals, Related Findings and Potential Strategies for Consideration...	38
--	-----------

List of Tables and Figures

Figures

- Figure 1. Regional Context
- Figure 2. Study Area Map
- Figure 3. Commercial Vacancy
- Figure 4. Comparative Commercial Rent and Tax Rate Analysis
- Figure 5. Ownership Characteristics
- Figure 6. Establishment Operating Hours
- Figure 7. Composition of Uses
- Figure 8. Commercial District Business Mix
- Figure 9. Business Mix Comparison
- Figure 10. Revenue Trends – Last 3 Years
- Figure 11. Sales/Customer Visits Generated from Tourists/Recreation Visitors
- Figure 12. Omni-Channel Selling
- Figure 13. Average Daily Customer Volume
- Figure 14. Actions Businesses are Considering - Next 3 Years
- Figure 15. Perception of Business Climate Change (Last 3 Years)
- Figure 16. Overall Satisfaction with Business Location
- Figure 17. Business Satisfaction Level – Lexington Center Features
- Figure 18. Satisfaction Level – Aspects of Business Operation in Lexington Center
- Figure 19. Business Owner Input Regarding Possible Strategy Ideas to Improve Vibrancy
- Figure 20. Frequency of User Visits to Lexington Center
- Figure 21. Frequency of User Visits to Lexington Center by Age Group
- Figure 22. Change in Visit Frequency – Last few Years
- Figure 23. Lexington Center Establishments & Amenities Visited/Used in Last Seven Days
- Figure 24. Consumer Satisfaction Level – Offerings in Lexington Center
- Figure 25. Portion of Restaurant Spending Completed Outside of Lexington Center
- Figure 26. Consumer Satisfaction Level – Features of Lexington Center
- Figure 27. Events/Cultural Activities that Users would like to see Hosted in Lexington Center
- Figure 28. Resident Input Regarding Possible Strategy Ideas to Improve Vibrancy

Tables

- Table 1. Establishment Type
- Table 2. Top Ten Most Frequently Found Establishments
- Table 3. Eating & Drinking Establishment Types
- Table 4. Key Demographics of Lexington and Surrounding Communities

Project Purpose, Process and Study Area

Purpose: To evaluate the existing retail environment in Lexington Center in order to inform future revitalization activities focusing on the mix of uses and overall goal of enlivening the center with additional users.

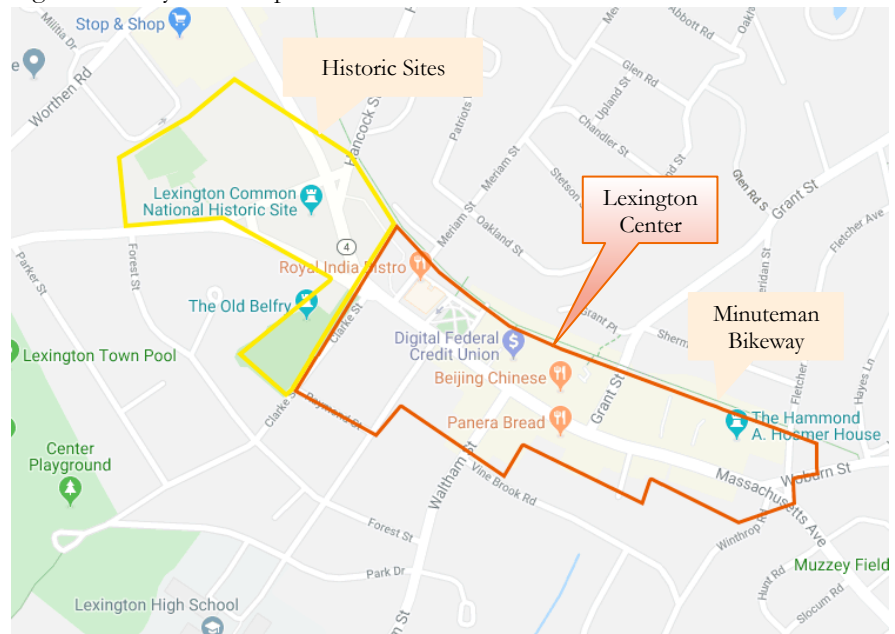
Process: FinePoint worked collaboratively with the Economic Development Office during the course of this project. We assessed the existing business mix, reviewed real estate conditions and interviewed real estate professionals and building owners. We conducted a User Survey with over 500 responses, conducted a business survey and obtained other business input, and collected data pertaining to Lexington and the surrounding communities. Using this research, we provided a summary of proposed goals, related findings and potential strategies and actions.

Context and Study Area: Lexington is located in Middlesex County, approximately 10 miles northwest of Boston. The town is known for its role in the American Revolutionary War and associated historic sites. Lexington Center is comprised of commercial uses along Massachusetts Avenue (a.k.a. Mass Ave) from approximately Woburn Street to Clarke Street. The Minuteman Bikeway borders the northern boundary of the district parallel to Mass Ave.

Figure 1. Regional Context



Figure 2. Study Area Map



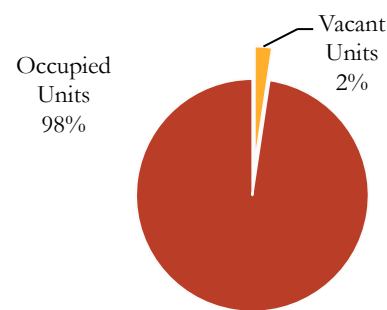
Part I. Business District Profile and Commercial Mix Analysis

A. Real Estate Overview

- Lexington Center is a compact commercial district with a charming historic character. The buildings are mostly one and two story structures situated along Massachusetts Avenue.
- Wide sidewalks and abundant seating opportunities make for a welcoming comfortable pedestrian environment. The Minuteman Bikeway, a 10-mile multi-use paved trail, runs parallel to Massachusetts Avenue and bikers are a common sight in the Center. The Bikeway extends from the neighboring town of Bedford to Alewife Station in Cambridge and is widely used for commuting as well as recreation.
- Several historic sites and monuments are located at the west end of the district including Lexington Battle Green, properly known as Lexington Common, where the first shot of the American Revolutionary War was fired. Battle Green, now a public park is home to the Minuteman Statue and other monuments. The Lexington Depot, built in 1847, has been renovated to serve as the headquarters of the Lexington Historical Society. Nearby historic sites include: Buckman Tavern, the Old Burying Ground, First Parish Church and the Hancock-Clarke House.
- A new Visitors Center is being constructed near the Lexington Depot and is scheduled to open in April 2020. The Visitor Center offers the Liberty Ride Trolley Tour, a 90-minute narrated tour through the history of Lexington and Concord. Other bus tours also make stops in Lexington and Concord.
- In total, Lexington Center contains approximately 165 commercial units. At the time of the inventory (August, 2019), there were 4 vacant commercial units comprising 2% of all units.



Figure 3. Commercial Vacancy



**Note: This analysis is based upon a business space inventory developed with information provided by the Lexington Economic Development Office and primary data collection conducted by FinePoint Associates.*

Commercial Leasing Environment and Business Occupancy Cost Compared to Other Town Centers

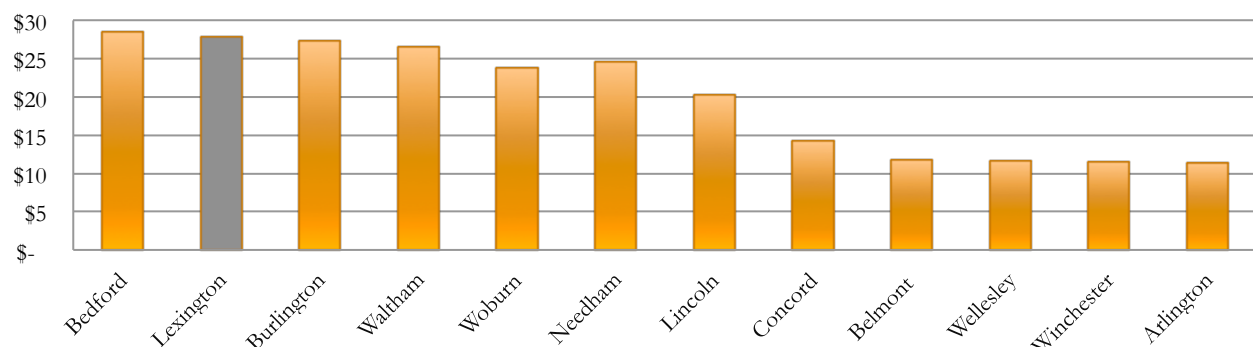
- Commercial rental rates in Lexington Center vary by unit size, location, condition and amenities. Asking rents (as of October, 2019) for available first floor space on Massachusetts Avenue were around \$50 psf (per square foot annually) and \$25 to \$35 psf for other floors. (Spaces located on side streets were available at lower rents.) According to real estate professionals we interviewed, the asking rents are higher than actual rents and there is a wide variance. We were told that not many spaces were being leased for over \$45 psf and not many spaces were under \$40 psf. The rental rates are “triple net” which means that the tenant pays for their portion of real estate taxes, insurance and common area maintenance in addition to the base rent.
- According to our interviews with local real estate professionals, base rents in Lexington Center are assumed to be generally higher than many surrounding town centers except perhaps Concord which might be fairly comparable. (However, the tax rate in Concord is lower.) This is supported by our review of asking rents.
- Due to the wide use of triple net leases, property tax rate has a significant impact on the cost of occupancy for businesses. A simple comparison of tax rates among communities is difficult because the services included varies significantly from town to town. With that caveat in mind, compared to the surrounding communities, Lexington’s commercial property tax rate is close to Bedford and Burlington, and higher than other surrounding and comparison communities.
- The real estate tax charge is a small component compared to base rent but it does drive occupancy cost up. For example, a business tenant paying \$6.00 psf for real estate tax charges in Lexington Center, would pay only \$3.00 psf for real estate net charges in Concord Center making the cost of occupancy less.
- These findings indicate that rents and tax rates are generally higher in Lexington Center compared to most of the surrounding and comparison communities which might pose a competitive disadvantage for recruiting small businesses.**

Figure 4. Comparative Commercial Rent and Property Tax Rate Analysis

Asking Rents in Surrounding and Comparison Town Centers

Commercial Areas	Asking Base Rent*	Illustrative Data - only for available first floor spaces listed on LoopNet, October, 2019
Arlington Ctr	\$20 - \$30	
Belmont Ctr	NA	Why comparison with these centers? Lexington Center User Survey respondents cited several desirable businesses they would like to have in Lexington Center currently located in commercial centers of Concord, Belmont, Winchester and Arlington. Needham and Wellesley Centers are frequently compared to Lexington Center.
Concord Ctr	NA	
Lexington Ctr	\$50	
Needham Ctr	\$33	
Wellesley Ctr	\$36 - \$45	
Winchester Ctr	\$31-35	

2019 Property Tax Rate per \$1000 of Assessed Value (*Impacts real estate costs charged to tenants beyond base rent)



B. Establishment Characteristics

- The Center is home to approximately 161 establishments including retail, restaurants, services, and other entities. For the purposes of this study, we define “establishment” as any non-residential entity.
- Most of the establishments are small (less than 1,200 – 1,500 sf). A few of the larger establishments include Panera Bread, CVS, and Cambridge Bank and Trust.



- Most of the establishments (66%) are independently-owned, single location businesses. National or regional multi-location businesses, chains and franchises comprise about 26% of the establishments (e.g., national banks, CVS, Bertucci's, Panera Bread, Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, etc.). Approximately 8% of the establishments are public sector entities or nonprofits.

Figure 5. Ownership Characteristics

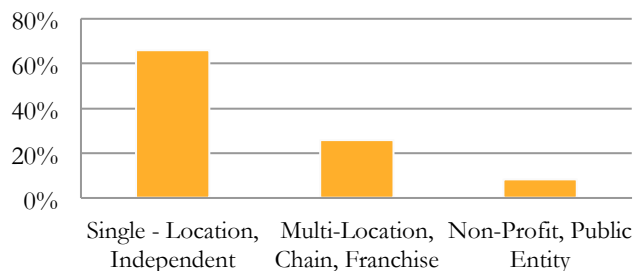


Table 1.

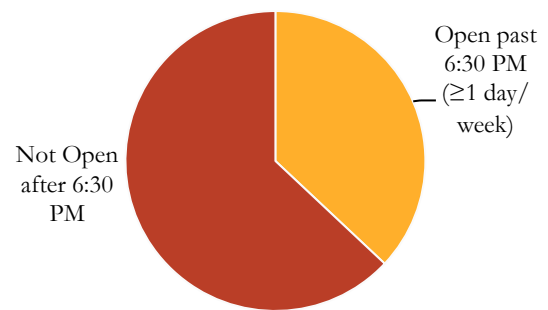
Establishment Type	#
Retail	25
Motor Vehicle & Parts	0
Furniture & Furnishings	3
Electronics & Appliances	1
Building Mat. & Garden Equip	0
Food & Beverage Stores	2
Health & Personal Care Stores	5
Gasoline Stations	0
Clothing and Accessories	7
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Books	3
General Merchandise Stores	0
Misc. Retail Stores	4
Eating, Drinking & Lodging	32
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	9
Accommodation	0
Eating and Drinking Places	23
Services	95
Finance & Insurance	18
Real Estate and Rental/Leasing	8
Professional, Scientific & Tech.	21
Educational Services	8
Health Care & Social Assist.	16
Repair & Maintenance	0
Personal Care & Laundry	20
Relig., Grant, Civic, Prof. Orgs.	4
Other	9
Agric., Forest, Fishing, Mining	0
Util., Const., Mfg, Wholesale	1
Transport, Postal & Warehouse	1
Information	3
Admin./Sup. & Waste Mgmt	2
Public Administration	2
Total Establishments	161

Vacant Commercial Units	4
TOTAL Commercial Units and Space	165

Note: The Establishment Type Table shows all business categories that may be present in downtowns/commercial districts. Showing all categories is intended to illustrate those that are represented as well as not represented.

- Lexington Center has significantly reduced activity in the evening except for restaurants and a few salons and other businesses. Approximately two-thirds of the establishments are not open beyond 6:30pm. As expected, this includes the banks, real estate agencies and professional offices. Many of the retailers are also not open any evening past 6:30 (e.g., Fire Fly Moon, Crafty Yankee, Revolve, Catch a Falling Star, Signature Stationers, Jewels from the Crown, etc.). A few shops are open late one evening per week but there is not a common “late evening” among the businesses (e.g., Michelson’s Shoes – Friday, Eye Look – Thursday, Sky Salon – Tuesday, Lexington Nails – Friday).
- Most of the businesses have at least some online presence (a google listing at a minimum) and the location and business hours are fairly easily discoverable online. Most restaurants and retailers show up on Yelp and Trip Advisor.

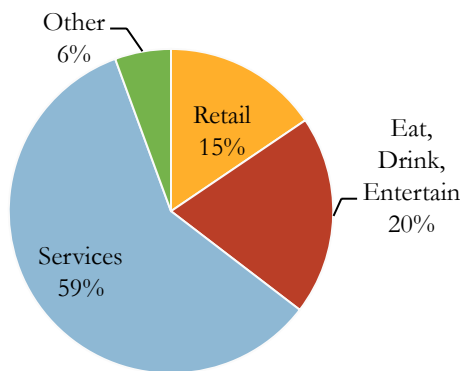
Figure 6. Establishment Operating Hours



C. Business District Composition Assessment

- More than half of the establishments (59%) in the commercial district are services, 15% are retailers, 20% fall under the category of restaurants, entertainment & recreation and 6% are other.
- The most represented industry subsectors (based on the number of establishments include: 1) Eating and Drinking Places, 2) Professional, Scientific & Technical, 3) Personal Care (e.g., hair/nail salons), 4) Finance & Insurance, and 5) Health Care & Social Assistance.

Figure 7. Composition of Uses
(# of establishments)



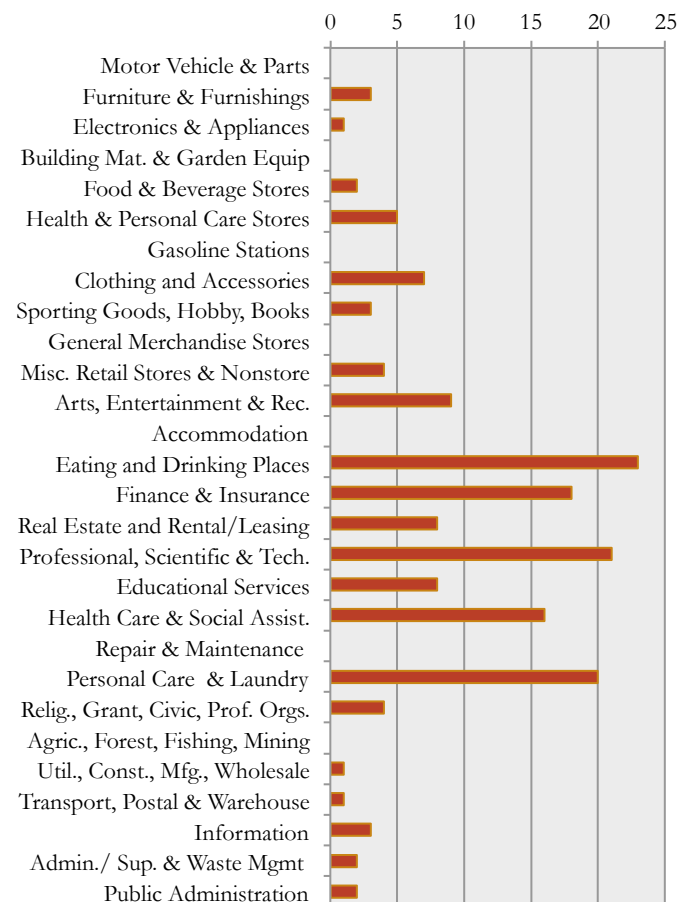
Note: The Commercial District Mix Chart shows all business categories that could be present in downtowns/commercial districts. Showing all categories is intended to illustrate those that are represented as well as not represented.

Table 2.

Top Ten Most Frequently Found Establishments

Rank	Industry Subsector	No.
1	Eating and Drinking Places	23
2	Professional, Scientific & Tech.	21
3	Personal Care & Laundry	20
4	Finance & Insurance	18
5	Health Care & Social Assist.	16
6	Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	9
7	Real Estate and Rental/Leasing	8
8	Educational Services	8
9	Clothing and Accessories	7
10	Health & Personal Care Stores	5

Figure 8. Commercial District Business Mix



Retail Establishments

- The Center is home to 25 retail establishments including a small selection of clothing and accessory stores (including a long-established shoe store), a few gift and specialty stores, a few home furnishing shops, 3 optical shops, 2 drug stores, 2 toy/hobby stores, 2 food and beverage stores and a unique combination bike shop/café.



Restaurants, Arts, Entertainment, Recreation (& Tourism)

- There are 23 eating places located in the Lexington Center.
- The restaurant selection includes 6 Asian eateries, 2 Indian (one that just opened), 3 Italian and a pizza place, 1 eclectic (café during the day, finer dining in the evening), 5 sandwich café/coffee shops, a creperie and 3 ice cream/yogurt shops. In addition, a new gourmet pasta shop with prepared take-home meals along with dine-in options is scheduled to open soon. 13 of the eating establishments serve alcohol; 2 of these are limited to beer and wine. Other restaurant types frequently found in downtowns but absent from Lexington Center include; American Pub, Mexican and breakfast/diner.
- The number of eating places in Lexington Center is approximately the same as the number located along the 1.5 mile Great Road corridor in the neighboring town of Bedford (a longer commercial corridor but a town significantly smaller in population).

Table 3.

Eating/Drinking Establishments Type	#
Full Service Restaurants	12
Limited Service Restaurants	8
Snack Shops (Ice Cream/Yogurt)	3
Total	23
Establishments that Serve Alcohol	13



Restaurants, Arts, Entertainment, Recreation (& Tourism) (Cont'd)

- One of the unique features of the Center is its arts and entertainment options including an independent movie theater and Cary Hall which hosts the Lexington Symphony and other live performances. Cary Memorial Library is a big attraction with many programs and activities.
- The Historical Society is located in the Center along with the Visitor Center. These entities coordinate volunteers that dress in period costumes and provide information for visitors and operate the Liberty Trolley Tour.
- There are also a several recreation options in the Center including fitness centers, personal training and yoga studios. Plus, the Center is adjacent to the Minuteman Bikeway and has a bike share program..



Service Establishments

- There are 95 service establishments in the Center including both professional and personal services.
- A strong cluster of small professional, scientific and technical firms have taken residence in the Center including 7 legal offices and 13 architecture, design and computer related companies.
- Financial services and real estate are well represented with 12 banks, 5 investment firms and 8 real estate offices.
- There are 13 healthcare establishments (dentists, chiropractors) and 8 educational service businesses (tutoring, after school enrichment).
- The Center also offers a large array of personal care. In all, there are 20 businesses that offer hair, skin, nail and other personal services.



Adjacent Historic Sites

- As noted earlier in this document, Lexington Center is adjacent to the historic Battle Green, several monuments and other historic sites, including the following.
 - Battle Green
 - Minuteman Statue
 - Preacher Stand
 - Parker Boulder
 - Revolutionary War Monument
 - Olde Burying Ground
 - The Belfry
 - Buckman Tavern
 - First Parish Church



Business Listing by Category

Furnishings & Furniture

Big Picture Framing
Hitrons
Robin Gannan Interiors/Haven

Electronics

Verizon IM Wireless Lexington

Food & Beverage

Cake, Inc.
Sweet Thyme Bakery

Health Care Stores & Optical

CVS Pharmacy
Eye Look Optical
Gordon Optical Co
Lexington Optical Associates
Theatre Pharmacy, Inc.

Clothing, Jewelry, Shoes

Artinian Jewelry
Emilia Creations
Fancy Flea Antiques & Fine Jewelry
JackRabbit
Jewels From The Crown
Michelson's Shoes
Revolve (consignment)
Popup Store: Ecoimagine
located in Power Yoga
(not included in business inventory)

Sporting Goods, Hobby, Toy

Catch a Falling Star
Omar's World of Comics
Ride Studio Café

Gifts, Occasion, Stationary

Crafty Yankee
Firefly Moon
Signature Stationers, Inc.
Up Up & Away Balloons

Banks, Mortgage & Other Credit

Bank of America
Boston Private Bank & Trust
Brookline Bank
Cambridge Savings Bank

Cambridge Trust Company
Citizens Bank
Digital Federal Credit Union
Eagle Bank
Eastern Bank
Santander
TD Bank
Webster Bank

Insurance

Encharter Insurance LLC

Real Estate

Barrett Sotheby's International
Berkshire Hathaway NE Prime
Properties
Century 21/Lester E. Savage
Coldwell Banker Residential
Brokerage
Grant B. Cole Realtors
Leading Edge Real Estate
MA Properties Online
William Raveis Real Estate

Legal Services

Barbara Jackins Home
Constant Law Group
HoustonHogle, LLP
Law Offices of Marian Abraham
Petrucelly, Norris & Minsch PC
Shlansky & CO. LLP
Sonja Selami Law Offices

Accounting, Tax, Other Finance

Arlex Wealth Management
Coromandel Wealth Management
Kane Investments, Inc.
Kennedy & Kennedy CPA
Lexington Wealth Management
LifeFirst Financial

Architecture, Design, Other Prof. Services

Bechtel Frank Erickson, Architects
Colin Smith Architecture, Inc
Complex IT
Conner Architecture

Evans Griffiths & Hart, Inc
Feinmann Inc
Incite Architecture
Katlin Travel Group
Latady Design, LLC
Neptune Web Inc.
NNE Marketing
Oldenburg Architecture
Partner Therapeutics
Shadley Associates
Traher Design/ Nieshoff Design

Educational Services

Children's Center of Lexington
College Nannies & Tutors
Empow Studios
FUSE Program & School
Lexington Playcare Center, Inc.
Livius Tutoring
Pinot's Palette
The Sitting Room

Healthcare Services

Affiliated Chiropractic PC
Arnis Berger Psychologist
Brett Davis, DMD
Coppe & Sears Pediatric Dental &
Orthodontics
Dental 28 Lexington
Eagle Endodontics
John R. Pallotta DMD
Keith Asarkof DMD & Associates
Levine Orthodontics
Lexington Counseling
Lexington Family Chiropractic
Limited To Endodontics
Maria C. Evangelisti, DMD, PC

Social Assistance

Excelled Care
Lexington Youth & Family Services
Social Service Centers, Inc

Business Listing by Category (cont'd)

Arts, Entertainment, Recreation

Btone fitness
Cary Hall
Elite Freestyle Karate
Lexington Arts and Crafts Society, Inc.
Lexington Historical Society
Lexington Power Yoga
Lexington Symphony
One 2 One Bodyscapes Personal Training
Spectacle Management

Movie Theater

Lexington Venue

Eating & Drinking Places

Abbott's Frozen Custard
Avenue Deli
Beijing Chinese Restaurant
Bertucci's Brick Oven Pizza, Inc.
Bulpan Grill
Clay Oven
Dabin Restaurant, Inc.
Daikanyama Japanese Cuisine
Dunkin Donuts/Baskin Robbins
Fruitee Yogurt
Il Casale
La Dolda LLC (opening soon)
Love at First Bite
Mario's Italian Restaurant
Panera Bread
Peet's Coffee & Tea
Rancatore's Ice Cream and Yogurt
Royal India Bistro
Sanyo Restaurant
Starbucks Coffee
Tres Petite Creperie
Upper Crust Pizzeria
Via Lago Cafe and Catering

Hair, Skin & Nail Services

Beersheba Nail & Spa
Blue - A Complete Hair Salon
Copoly Salon
Dellaria Salon/Lexington Salon
Dorina Nails
Eccoli Hair Design, Inc.
Eyebrow Threading
La Flamme Barber Shop
Lexington Nails
Liatris Hair Design
MiniLuxe
Nails by Noel
Organic Nail and Spa
Paul Mammola Salon
Sky Salon
Stephanie Louis Salon

Dry Cleaning & Laundry

Craft Cleaners

Other Personal Care/Massage

Absolute Tranquility
Bodywork Revolution
Lexington Therapeutic Massage

Civic/Community, Religious, Public

Cary Memorial Library
Christian Science Reading Room
Lexington Chamber of Commerce
Lexington Town Office Building
Lexington Visitors Center
Police Station
Sword & Spoon Group
U.S. Post Office

Other Businesses

Colonial Times
Lexington Minuteman
Wales Copy Center/Andrew T. Johnson

**Note: This listing is based upon available information at the time of the inventory; some establishments may be missing, especially if located in upper floors or interior office spaces without public street access/signage.*

Business Linkages and Clusters

The presence of significant linkages between businesses is an important aspect of a good business mix. This should be considered when exploring opportunities for new businesses. Identifying existing business linkages and clusters that already exist in a commercial district can reveal existing customer patterns as well as point to potential opportunities for new related businesses.

Sometimes businesses are linked because they provide crossover-shopping opportunities for customers. In other words, a customer might be likely to patronize several of the businesses in a cluster in order to purchase related goods or services (e.g. shoes and clothing) or to complete several transactions during the same shopping trip (e.g. bank, post office, drugstore). Or, the businesses might be linked because they serve similar market segments, customers with common characteristics (i.e., interests, needs, tastes, lifestyles, buying behavior). Business can also be linked because they provide comparative shopping opportunities. In this case, a grouping of businesses can attract more customers than a single business because the consumer can explore a greater variety of options in the same shopping trip (and an area can get known for offering a certain type of good or service).

The Center has several existing crossover, market segment and comparative clusters. New businesses might be able to feed off customer traffic from existing businesses and complement/expand these clusters.

Restaurants & Entertainment Cluster (Comparative/Crossover)

23 eating places
Lexington Venue (independent movie theater)
Cary Hall

Wellness, Fitness & Recreation Cluster (Market Segment)

Several fitness/yoga studios
Ride Studio Café (bike shop café)
Jackrabbit (athletic apparel/shoes)
Minuteman Bikeway
Massage, acupuncture & meditation services



Visitors/Tourists Cluster (Market Segment)

2 gift stores
23 eating places (incl. 3 ice cream/yogurt shops)
Visitor Center
Trolley Tour
Historical Society

Children/Families Cluster (Market Segment)

Cary Memorial Library
Several educational services (tutoring, enrichment)
Catch a Falling Star (toy store)
3 ice cream/yogurt shops
Dentists

Errands and Personal Services Cluster (Crossover)

Hair and nail services
Drycleaners
Post Office
2 drug stores

Financial & Real Estate Services Cluster (Comparative/Crossover)

12 banks, 5 investment companies,
8 real estate offices

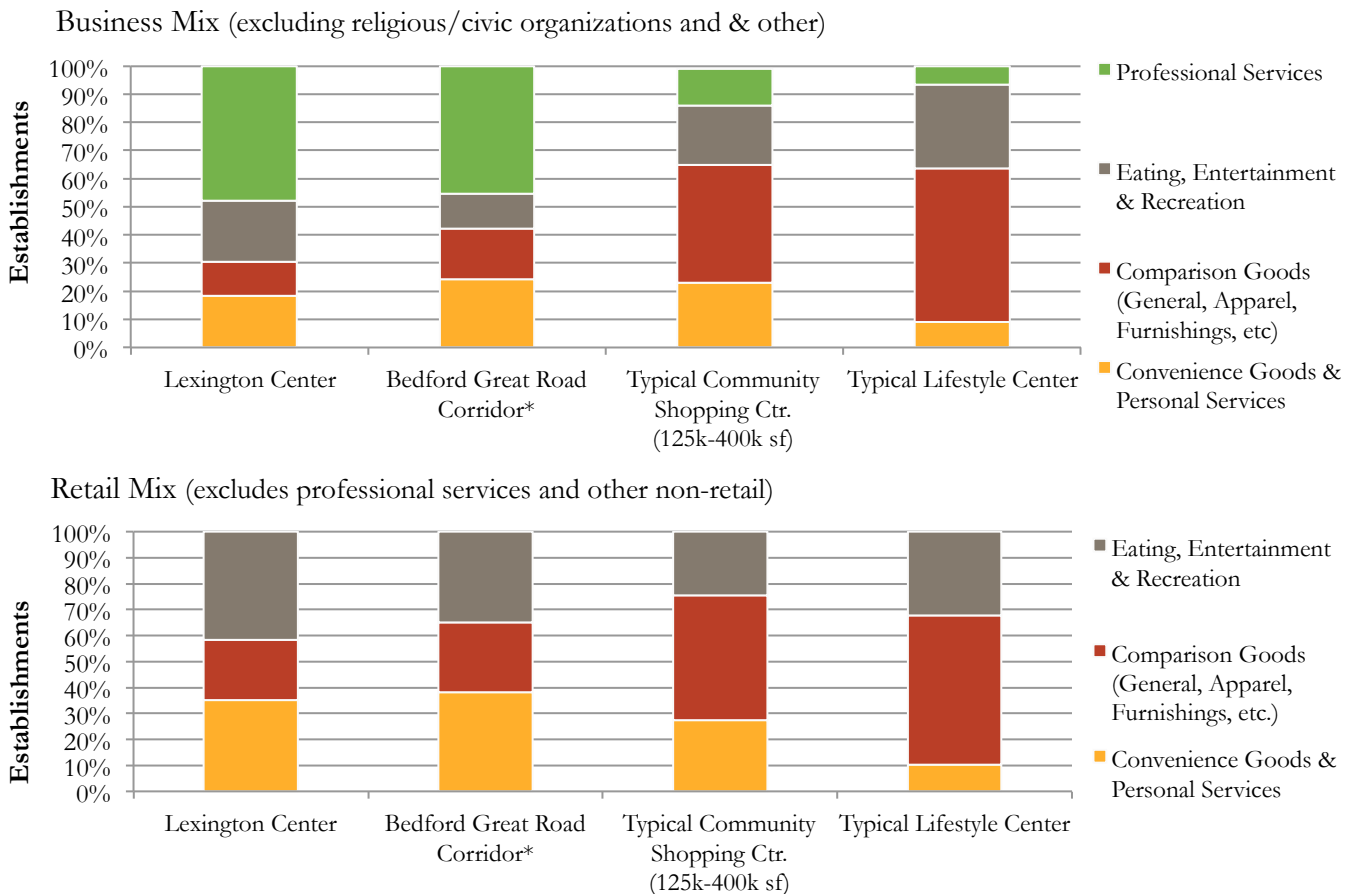
Eyewear Cluster (Comparative)

3 optical shops

D. Comparative Business Mix Analysis

The charts below illustrate the business mix in Lexington Center compared to two typical types of single-developer commercial centers as well as a neighboring commercial corridor. Lexington Center has approximately the same number of establishments as the Bedford Great Road Corridor, however many of the Great Road businesses are larger. Lexington Center has a higher percentage of Eating, Entertainment & Recreation and a smaller percentage of Comparison Goods (general merchandise, furnishings) and Convenience Goods (grocery, liquor). Compared to the community shopping and lifestyle centers, Lexington Center has a larger proportion of Professional Services and a smaller portion of Comparison Goods businesses.

Figure 9. Business Mix Comparison



*Bedford Great Road Corridor was used for comparison because it is located in an adjacent community, has close to the same number of businesses and data from 2017 was available.

Examples of establishment types often found in downtowns that are not present in Lexington Center include:

- Wider variety of restaurants (e.g., American pub style, Mexican, Breakfast), restaurants with entertainment
- Food and beverage stores (grocery, bakery, liquor, specialty foods)
- Pet goods/services

Compared to downtowns with significant tourism components, Lexington Center has less gift/jewelry/specialty shops.

Part II. Business Conditions, Business Satisfaction and Input

A. Business Conditions

- We conducted a survey of businesses in Lexington Center during September and October, 2019. 43 businesses responded, representing just over one-quarter of all of the establishments in the downtown area.
- The respondents represent new as well as more established businesses but the majority are long-time occupants. 65% of the businesses have been operating at their location in the Center for 10 years or more, while 26% have been at the location for 5-9 years and 9% for less than 5 years.
- The vast majority of businesses (86%) rent the space where they operate while 14% own their business premises.
- The downtown is a major employment center. The businesses that responded to the survey have an average of 4.8 full-time employees and 4.9 part-time employees (the median is 4 and 3). If we apply these averages to all businesses, we can estimate that there are approximately 773 full-time employees and 789 part-time employees working in Lexington Center.
- Sales have increased for some businesses while declined for others. 35% of the businesses reported that sales have increased in the last 3 years, 42% said sales stayed about the same and 23% said sales have gone down.
- Approximately one-half of the businesses benefit from tourism/recreation visitors while the other half (49%) reported no impact. The no-impact group included mostly professional and personal service providers, healthcare businesses and educational services but also included a couple of small retailers. 30% of the businesses estimated that tourists account for between 2 and 9% of their sales; these were predominantly retail and restaurants, but also included a couple of personal services. 12% of the businesses estimated that tourists represent between 10 and 29% of their sales (all retailers and restaurants). The few establishments that reported tourists accounting for 50% or more of their sales are specifically targeted to visitors (e.g., Visitor Center/Trolley, Historical Society).
- Approximately one-third of the businesses supplement their through-the-door sales with on-line sales.

Figure 10. Revenue Trend Last 3 Years

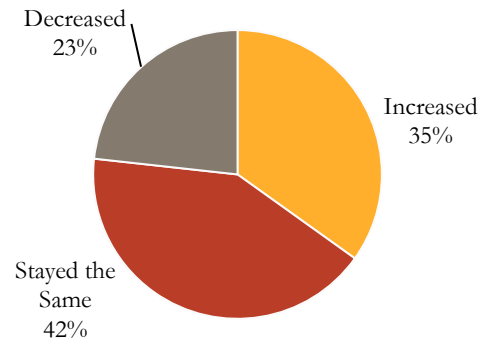


Figure 11. Sales/Customer Visits Generated from Tourists/Recreation Visitors

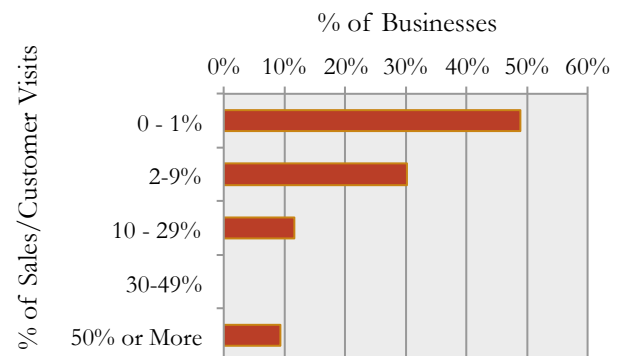
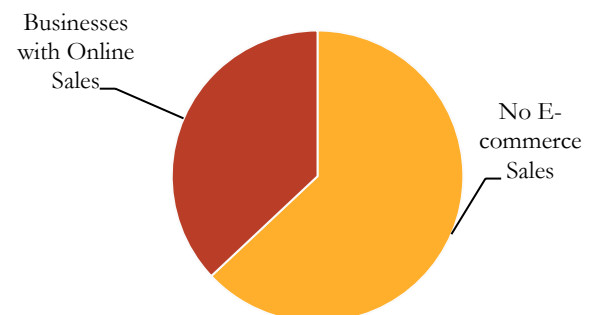
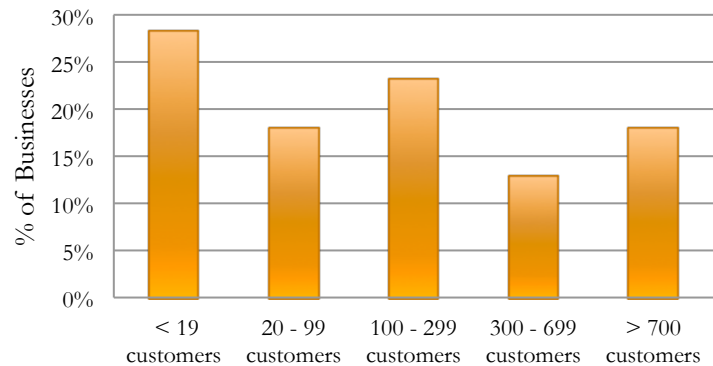
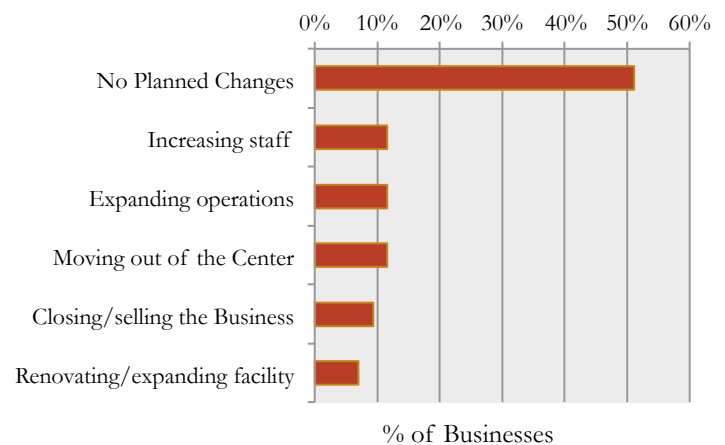


Figure 12. Omni-Channel Selling



- Weekly customer counts vary widely among the establishments in the Center. The median among the responding businesses is around 150; the average is closer to 300.
- Restaurants reported the highest customer counts and comprise the majority of the businesses with weekly customer counts over 700. Businesses reporting between 100 and 700 weekly customers included mostly retailers, educational services, and banks. The establishments with less than 100 customers per week included professional and personal services, healthcare providers, and a few small specialty retailers.
- Close to half of the businesses (47%) are contemplating some kind of change in the next 3 years. On the positive side, 12% are considering increasing staff and 12% are considering expanding operations. On a less positive note, 12% are considering moving out of the Center and 10% are considering closing or selling the business.

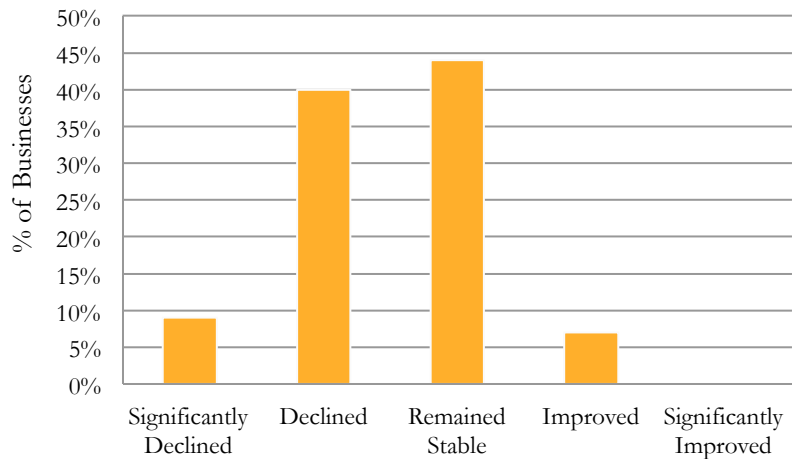
Figure 13. Average Weekly Customer Volume

Figure 14.
Actions Businesses are Considering - Next 3 Years

B. Business Satisfaction

Almost half of the business respondents (49%) feel that the business climate in Lexington Center has declined in the last 3 years. 44% feel that the climate has stayed the same and 7% feel that it has improved.

Figure 15.
Perception of Business Climate Change (Last 3 Years)



We asked business owners to identify the advantages of a business location in Lexington Center. The most frequent responses are listed below.

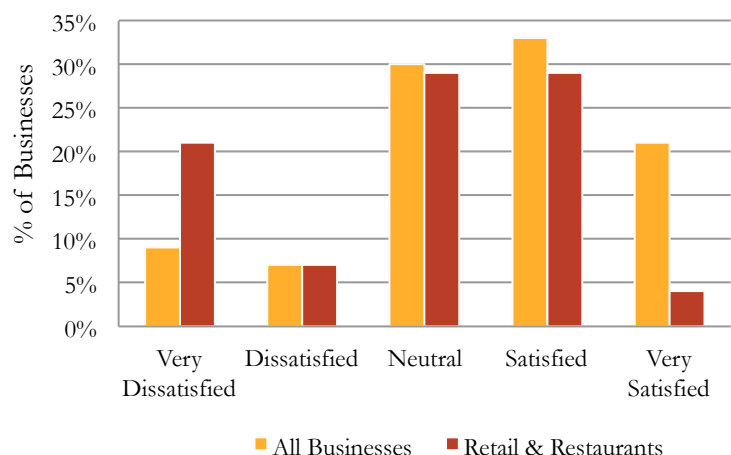
Top Advantages of a Lexington Center Business Location (as identified by business owners)

- ✓ Central/convenient location
- ✓ Demographics of Lexington households
- ✓ Physically attractive historic center
- ✓ Restaurants/food options
- ✓ Close to bike path

Approximately half of the businesses (53%) are satisfied with their current business location. 30% are neutral on the subject and 16% are dissatisfied. While the majority are satisfied, this isn't a ringing endorsement. If other location options become available, the Center may be at risk for losing the businesses that are dissatisfied as well as some portion of the neutral businesses. Furthermore, the retail and restaurants appear to be less satisfied with their current locations. 29% are dissatisfied and most of these are "very dissatisfied".

The following charts illustrate the satisfaction ratings for various aspects of the Center.

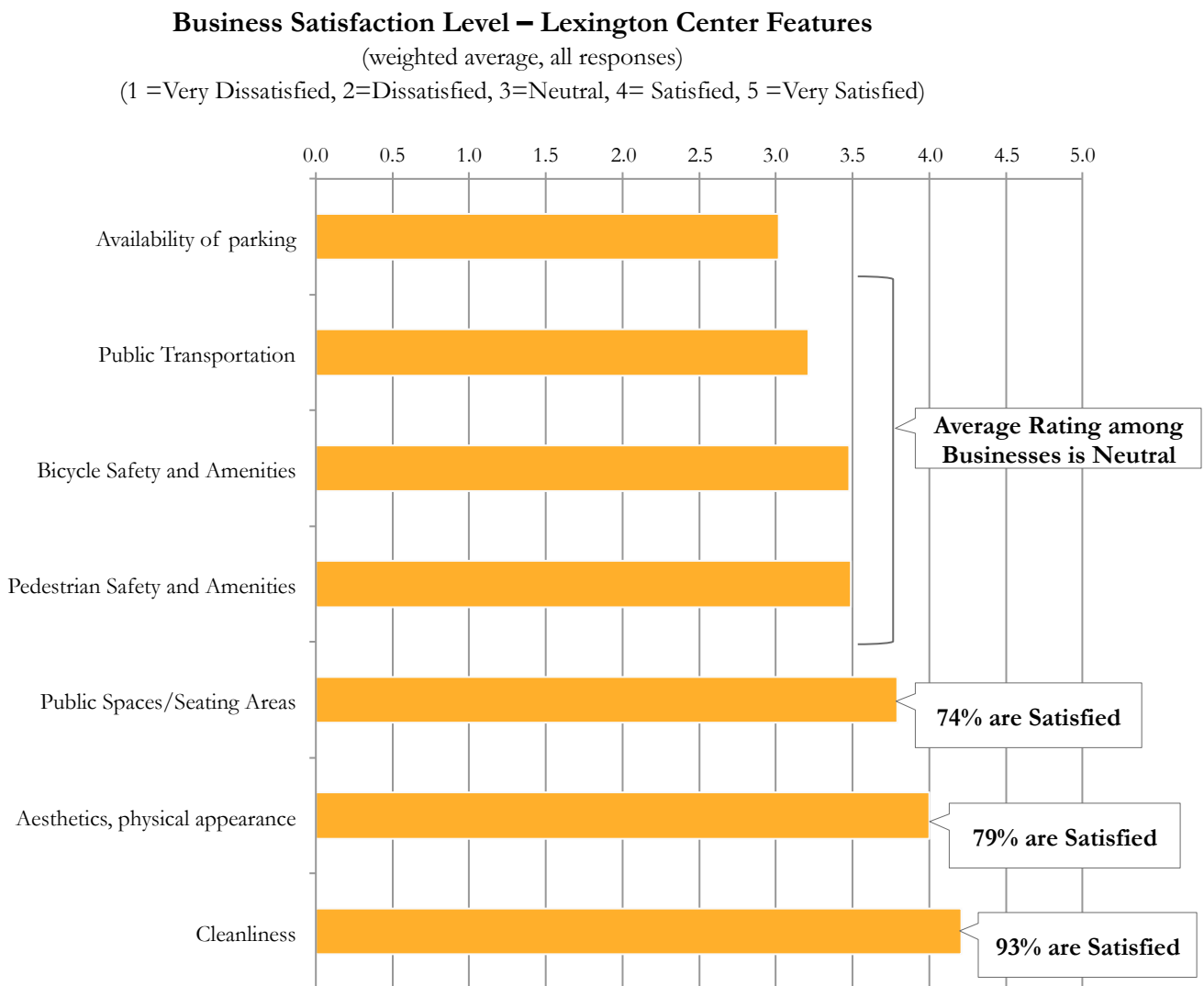
Figure 16.
Overall Satisfaction with Business Location



Business Satisfaction with Lexington Center Features

For the most part, businesses are happy with the features of Lexington Center. A clear majority expressed satisfaction with the Center's cleanliness, aesthetics/physical appearance and public spaces/seating areas. Other features such as parking, transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian amenities received more mixed opinions but the average rating among all business respondents fall within the neutral range.

Figure 17.

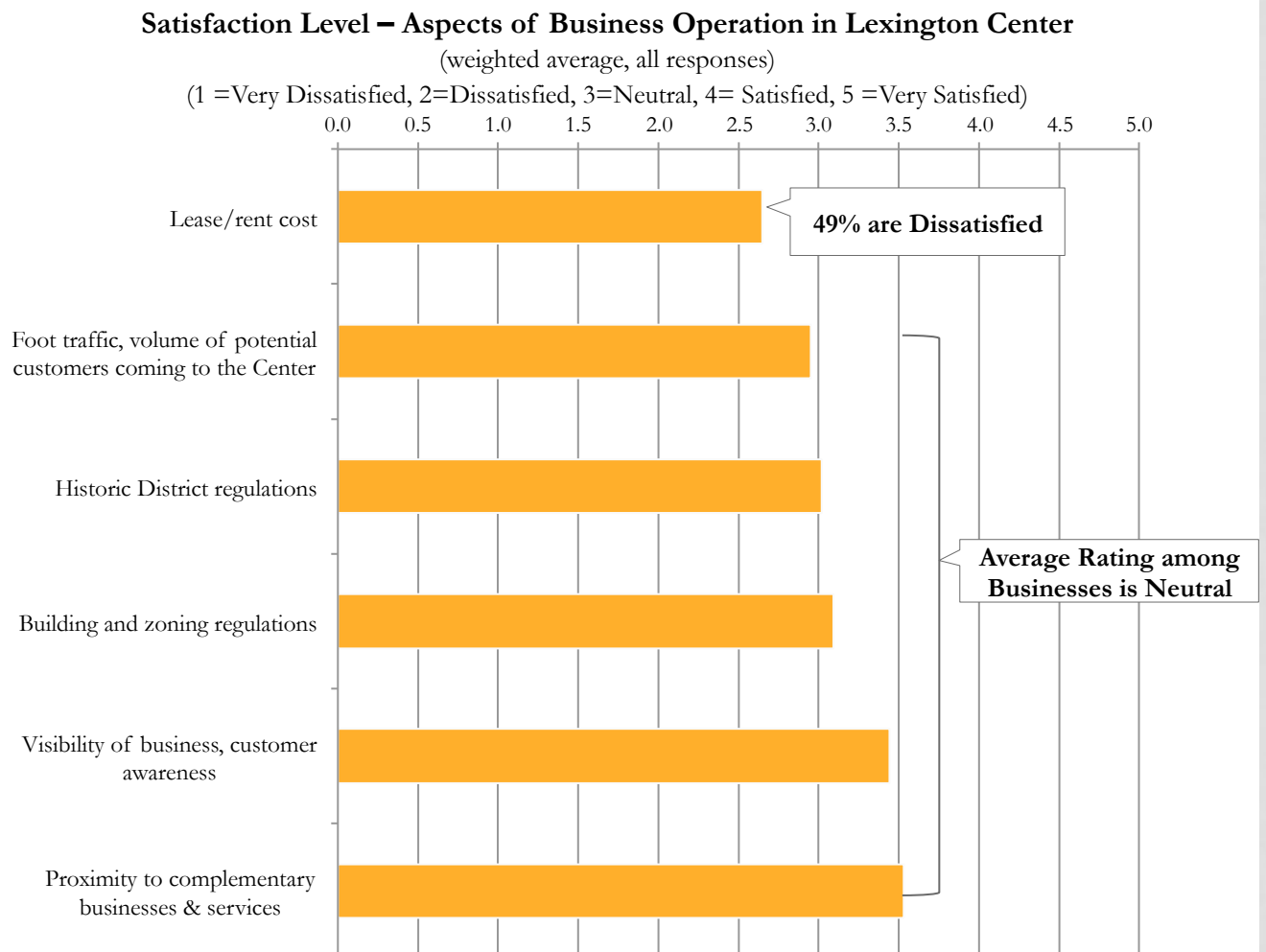


Business Satisfaction with Aspects of Business Operation in Lexington Center

The biggest complaint from the business owners regarding business operation in Lexington Center is the high cost of occupancy/rent (which typically includes real estate taxes due to triple net leases). Other aspects received mixed reviews but the overall average ratings fall within the neutral range.

The picture changes somewhat when we look at the satisfaction ratings among only retail and restaurant businesses. This group is impacted more by rent cost and foot traffic. A larger portion are unhappy with the cost of leasing in the Center (64% are dissatisfied). And, a full 50% are dissatisfied with the foot traffic/volume of customers coming to the Center.

Figure 18.



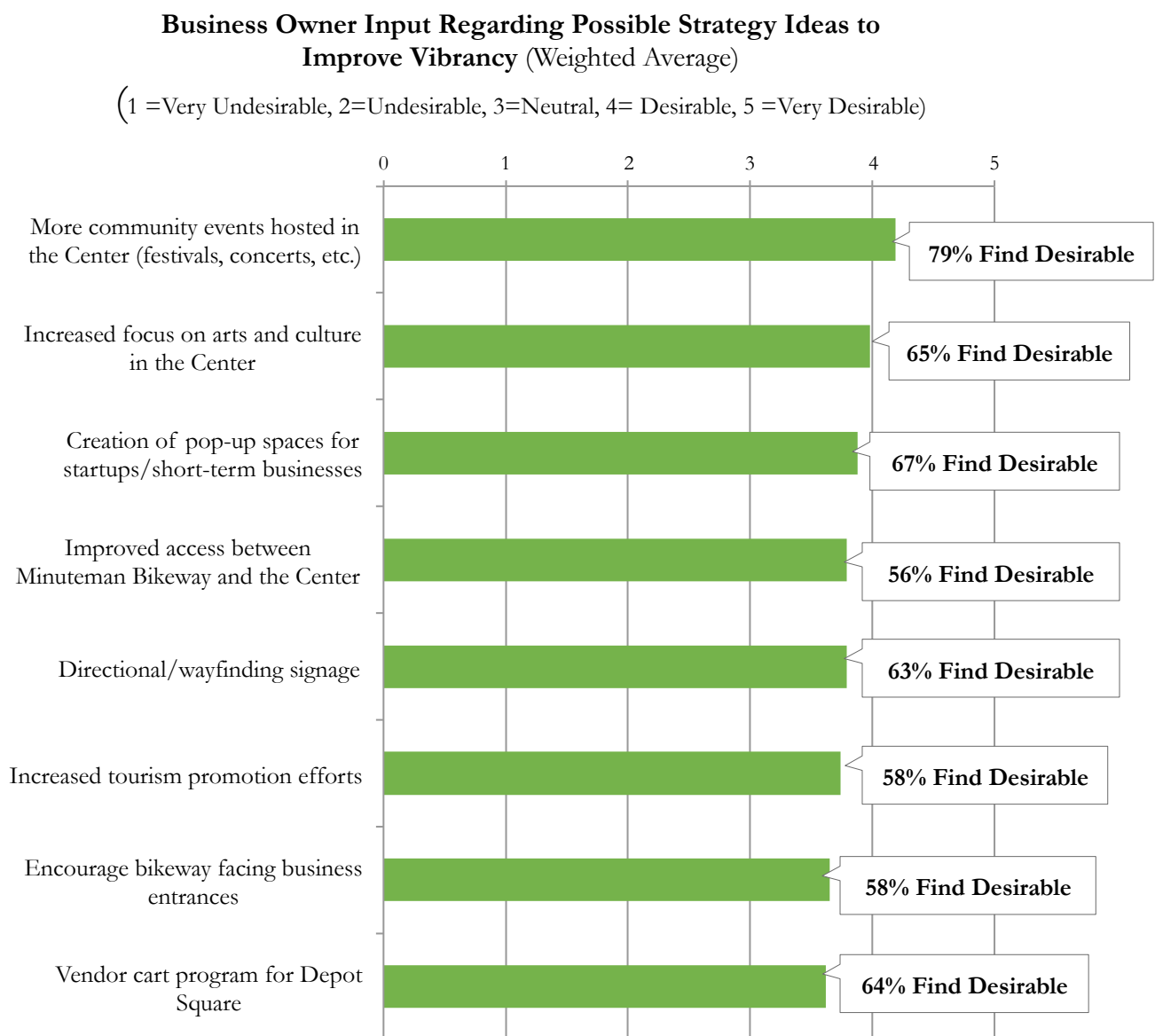
C. Business Input Concerning Potential Future Actions

Strategy Ideas to Improve Vibrancy

In general, Lexington Center businesses are supportive of the proposed strategy ideas to improve vibrancy. More than 50% of the respondents are in favor of all proposed activities.

The clear front-runner, with 79% support from the businesses, is “more community events hosted in the Center”.

Figure 19.



Establishment Types that would Enhance Success of Existing Businesses

The desirable types of new establishments most frequently mentioned by business representatives include:

- Restaurants especially health food options, breakfast place, and tavern/pub with good beer.
- Retail especially unique stores/boutiques, clothing stores, children's stores, and pop-up stores.

Other Suggestions to Improve the Business Environment in Lexington Center

Suggestions most frequently mentioned were centered around the following themes.

- Lower the cost of occupancy especially for small businesses (rent, taxes) through incentives or other means.
 - Market the Center to potential customers and encourage "Buy Local".
 - Improve communication with business owners regarding construction/streetscape renovation project to minimize impact on businesses.
 - Allow/facilitate signage that helps identify businesses to potential customers.
 - Increase the length of time for parking meters.
-

D. Other Input Regarding Factors Inhibiting Small Businesses from Locating/Thriving in the Center

We obtained additional input from interviews and conversations with a few business and real estate representatives. Below represents the themes and comments that came up.

Cost of Occupancy (rent and taxes)

As previously mentioned in this report, the cost of occupancy for businesses (including rent and property tax) is higher in Lexington than surrounding communities. This may be inhibiting small independent businesses from locating in the Center and contributing to the location of larger institutions and chain businesses that can bear more cost.

Regulatory Concerns

In the course of our research, we heard people say that the time to get through the regulatory process for renovating or building out a space is longer in Lexington than other communities. This perception could be discouraging to new businesses. We also heard negative comments about signage restrictions and the potentially lengthy process for new signage approvals from groups that do not meet frequently (e.g., Historic District).

Live music and entertainment offerings (e.g., trivia contests) in restaurants, coffee shops and pubs can increase customer attraction and keep people in the commercial center longer. The licensing process in Lexington might be inhibiting businesses in the Center from trying to offer occasional live music or other entertainment. An entertainment license is required for all entertainment and the process includes submitting an application, paying a fee and getting Board of Selectmen approval.

Business Mix Overwhelmed by Financial and Real Estate Offices

Several people mentioned the mix of businesses not being consistent with attracting people to come to the Center, walk around, browse, eat and socialize. Even though there are many restaurants and retailers in the Center, several people feel the mix is overwhelmed by banks and real estate agents which may deter small businesses looking for synergy with similar businesses. (In 2016, the town changed local zoning regulations to make banks and real estate offices allowable in most storefront locations only by special permit.)

Losing Lexington Shoppers/Diners to Concord

A few people expressed concern about Lexington Center increasingly losing Lexington resident customers (with their high incomes and spending power) to surrounding town centers especially Concord. This is consistent with findings of the user survey.

Missed Opportunity to Engage Families and Youth

More than 1 out of every 4 residents in Lexington (26%) is under the age of 18. We heard comments pertaining to the offerings in the Center not focusing on youth and families (even though they comprise a large portion of the surrounding demographic).

Lack of Tour Buses Coordination

While the town of Lexington runs its own tour – the Liberty Ride, there are also other large tour busses that come through the Center bringing visitors to the historic sites. The town currently does not have any special permitting or license arrangements with the bus companies, however there is designated bus parking near Battle Green (a bit removed from the prime commercial area). This arrangement leads to unpredictability of schedules and missed opportunities to make tour customers more aware of what else the center has to offer.

Need for Handicap Restrooms in Small Spaces and Cost of Elevators

A few people mentioned renovation obstacles potentially inhibiting small business location in the Center. In many cases, businesses need to install handicap restrooms and this can be an issue given the small size of the commercial units and how much space would need to be dedicated. Elevators are often required to make upper floors useable and the cost can be prohibitive if the space will only be used for one or two small business tenants.

Part III. Community Profile, Consumer Patterns, Preferences and Input

A. Community Profile

The town of Lexington has approximately 33,792 residents. The population is predominantly high income and very well-educated. The median household income is \$162,083, more than twice the statewide median, and higher than all surrounding communities. 82% of the residents over age 25 have a Bachelor's Degree or higher (again, a rate higher than all surrounding communities).

Lexington is a community with a high percentage of families with children and large households. 26% of residents are children under the age of 18 and the median household size is 2.8, the highest of the surrounding communities.

The population is predominantly White (68%) with a large percentage of Asian residents (27% compared to the statewide average of 7%).

The retail sales per square foot in Lexington is less than several of the surrounding communities including: Bedford, Burlington, Concord, Waltham and Woburn.

Table 4. Key Demographics of Lexington and Surrounding Communities

	Lexington	MA	Arlington	Bedford	Belmont	Burlington	Concord	Lincoln	Waltham	Woburn	Winchester
Pop., Income & Education											
Population, 2018	33,792	6,902,149	45,624	14,195	26,330	28,742	19,211	6,797	62,962	40,397	22,851
Median household income (2017\$)	\$162,083	\$74,167	\$103,594	\$125,208	\$118,370	\$99,254	\$137,743	\$134,211	\$83,249	\$83,304	\$152,196
Per capita income (2017\$)	\$74,427	\$39,913	\$55,104	\$57,774	\$61,122	\$45,962	\$68,012	\$81,694	\$39,299	\$38,761	\$74,405
Bachelors Degree or higher, 25+	82%	42%	70%	70%	73%	54%	71%	76%	51%	41%	76%
Children & Household Size											
Persons <age 18	26%	20%	22%	25%	25%	20%	23%	28%	14%	19%	28%
Persons per household	2.8	2.5	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.8
Race											
Population, White	68%	81%	82%	79%	80%	76%	84%	80%	74%	83%	83%
Population, Asian	27%	7%	12%	15%	16%	16%	6%	10%	12%	7%	13%
Density & Retail Sales											
Population per square mile, 2010	1,910.30	839.4	8,325.70	975.3	5,316.90	2,087.80	720.6	447.2	4,763.30	3,017.00	3,545.80
Total retail sales per capita, 2012	\$8,564	\$13,980	\$6,036	\$14,642	\$7,563	\$47,500	\$11,827	\$6,368	\$16,812	\$27,057	\$5,907

Sources: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2013-2017

Consumer Patterns, Preferences and Input Research -- In collaboration with the Lexington Economic Development Office, FinePoint Associates conducted a survey (September 2019) and received responses from **519 users**. (95% of the respondents are Lexington residents). The following sections provide highlights from the survey results.

B. Consumer Patterns

1. Patronage Frequency and Trends

Lexington Center Users visit the Center frequently. 64% visit several times per week while another 23% visit once per week.

The younger segment (age 25-44, comprised of Millennials and late Gen Xers/Xennials) appear to visit Lexington Center with the same frequency as residents age 45 -64.

Patronage appears to be holding constant among most users, however slightly more users experienced a decline than experienced an increase. 22% said their visit frequency has declined in the last few years while 18% said their frequency has increased.

Figure 20.

Frequency of Visits to Lexington Center
(excludes employees located in Lexington Center)

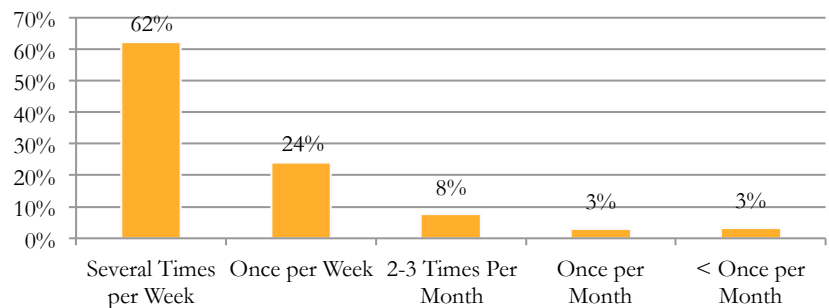


Figure 21.

Frequency of Visits (by Age Group)
(excludes employees located in Lexington Center)

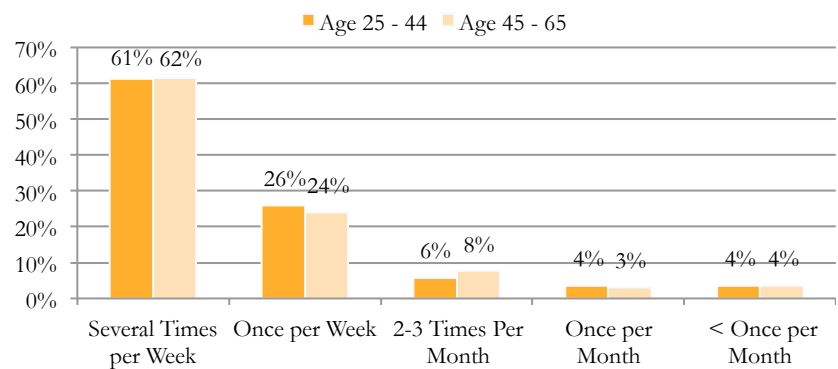
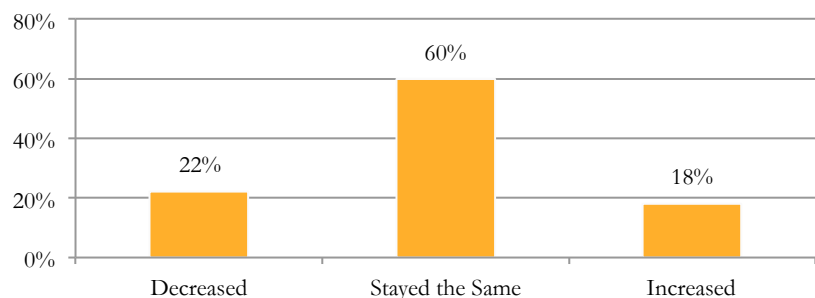


Figure 22.

Change in Visit Frequency in Last Few Years
(excludes employees located in Lexington Center)



2. Establishments and Amenities Visited/Used

As in many downtowns, food has replaced retail as the new anchor. In the last 7 days, over 60% of survey respondents visited a restaurant in the Center.

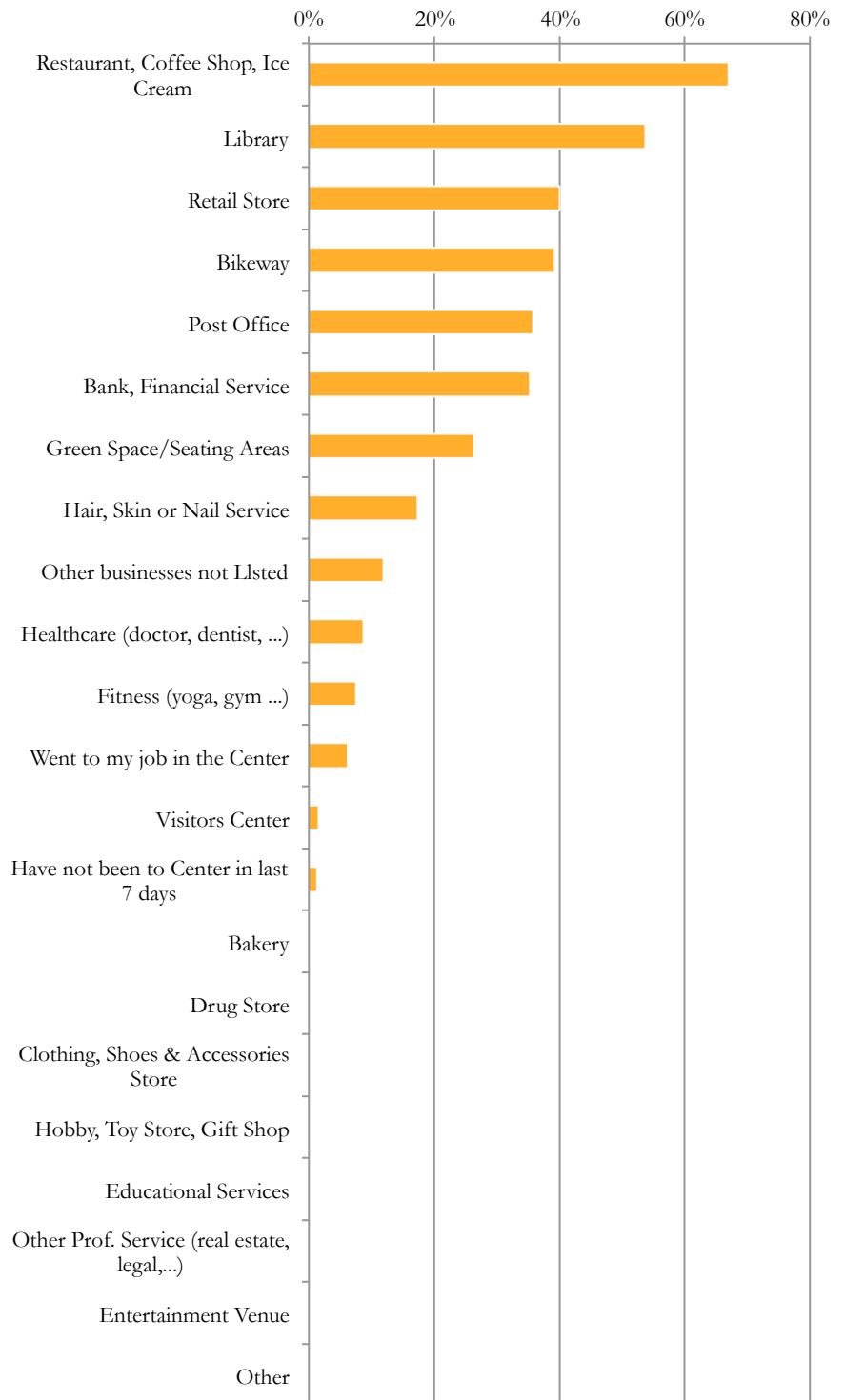
The library also serves as a major draw.

The most frequently visited/used establishments and amenities include restaurants, followed by the library, retail stores, the bikeway and the post office.

Green space and seating areas are also very important to Lexington Center users. 26% of respondents reported using these amenities in the last week.

Figure 23.

Lexington Center Establishments & Amenities Visited/Used in Last 7 Days

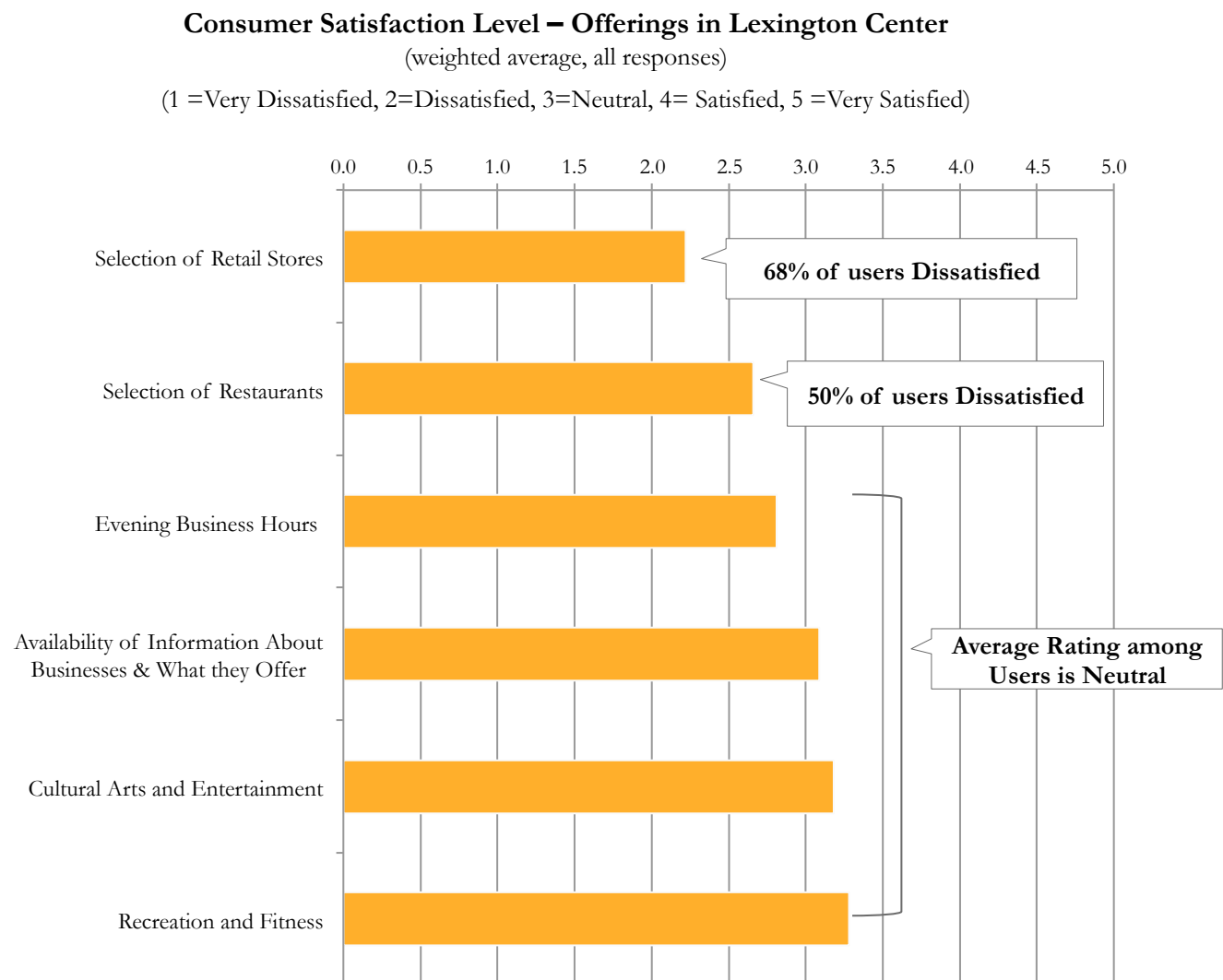


C. Consumer Satisfaction and Preferences

1. Customer Satisfaction with Lexington Center Offerings

A clear majority of users expressed dissatisfaction with the selection of retail stores. 68% of survey respondents said they are “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied”. The dissatisfaction with the selection of restaurants is not quite as high but still significant – 50% of survey respondents said they are “very dissatisfied” or “dissatisfied”; 26% are “neutral” and 24% are “satisfied” or “very satisfied”. The other offering categories received average ratings in the “neutral” range. However, it should be noted that 32% of users expressed dissatisfaction with businesses not being open in the evening, potentially representing a missed opportunity for businesses.

Figure 24.



2. Desired Retail Stores

When asked what would bring them into the Center more frequently, a very large portion (hundreds) of respondents made comments such as “more interesting stores”, “more independent shops”, “more variety of stores” or simply “more retail”.

We also asked respondents what specific type of stores they would patronize if located in Lexington Center. We clarified this by requesting that respondents explicitly consider their online purchasing opportunities and other options to acquire goods before answering this question. We received **close to 1,000** “write-in” responses.

The major themes that came up most often are described below in order of frequency.

1. **Clothing & Accessories Stores** (over 250 write-ins) – all kinds, especially women’s clothing, children’s clothing and athletic clothing. Many respondent’s requested women’s shops similar to stores in Concord, Belmont and Winchester. Examples of specific stores cited include: Irresistibles and French Lessons.
 2. **Bookstore** (over 175 write-ins) – independent bookstore similar to Belmont Books, Brookline Booksmith.
 3. **Specialty Food Stores** (over 175 write-ins) – especially a bakery, gourmet specialty, chees & wine shop.
 4. **Gift Shops/Artisan Shops** (over 75 write-ins) – especially artisan goods, unique and funky, stores similar to those found in Belmont, Concord and Northampton. Several respondents mentioned Westcott Mercantile (Belmont).
 5. **Home Goods/Housewares** (over 40 write-ins)
 6. **Hardware Store** (over 40 write-ins)
 7. **Children’s Goods/Activities** (over 15 write-ins plus over 30 write-ins under clothing) – crafts for kids, toys, clothing
-

3. Desired Restaurants

We also asked respondents what specific type of restaurants (if any) they would patronize if located in Lexington Center. We received **over 1,100** “write- in” responses. The major themes that came up most often are described below in order of frequency.

1. **American Grill/Pub with Bar** (over 200 write-ins) – Respondents said they were looking for American cuisine, a place where you could meet for drinks, potentially a brew pub/microbrewery or tavern type establishment. Examples of specific restaurants cited as examples include: Vinebrook Tavern (previous in Lexington, now closed), The Local (multiple locations), Main Street’s Market and Cafe (Concord), Red Heat Tavern (Bedford, Milford) and Not Your Average Joe’s (multiple locations).
2. **Breakfast Place/Brunch/Diner** (over 175 write-ins) - Respondents are interested in actual sit-down hearty breakfasts, more than a coffee shop provides, in a diner type atmosphere (that might also serve lunch and other meals but breakfast/brunch appears to be a main focus). Several respondents specified they wanted a place that would be open Saturday and Sunday. Examples of specific restaurants cited include: Minuteman Diner (Bedford), Zaftig’s (Brookline) and The Friendly Toast (multiple locations).
3. **Healthy, Vegetarian/Plant-based, Farm-to-Table** (close to 100 write-ins) - Americans have become increasingly interested in the healthfulness of the food they are consuming and where it is sourced. Survey respondents indicated a desire for more healthy and farm-fresh dining options in Lexington Center ranging from juice bars/smoothies to fast casual meals to sit-down dinners. Examples of specific restaurants cited as examples include: Sweet Greens (multiple locations), Life Alive (Cambridge, Brookline), Tender Greens (Union Square, Chestnut Hill), Clover Food Lab (Burlington, Boston, Cambridge, Westford, Sudbury) and 80 Thoreau (farm-to-table in Concord). See more examples of health and food-source conscious cafes under “Burger/Sandwiches/Salads”.
4. **Mexican** (close to 100 write-ins) – Among the desirable eateries mentioned were full-service Mexican restaurants as well as more fast casual options such as taquerias and burrito places. Several respondents cited the example of Anna’s Taqueria (Brookline, Boston).
5. **Burgers/Sandwiches/Salads** (over 75 write-ins) – Many respondents said they would patronize a new burger/sandwich/salad place if located in Lexington Center. There is particular interest in an “independent establishment, or at least one “without a big chain feel”. Many respondents cited the example of the Pressed Café (Burlington, Nashua) and one respondent cited the Twisted Café (Lincoln) as desirable options for Lexington Center. Both of these have a health-forward orientation. Several respondents also cited The Concord Cheese Shop, a unique combination cheese store/sandwich/bar, and one respondent mentioned B.Good (multiple locations), a casual burger and sandwich place with a focus on local food sourcing.

In addition to the types of restaurant cuisine, many respondent offered comments about the desirability of more: “upscale dining”, “family-friendly dining”, and “outdoor dining”.

4. Restaurant Usage and Potential Opportunity

Unmet Demand points to possible Market Opportunity. . .

On average, Lexington residents report doing less than 30% of their annual restaurant spending in Lexington Center.

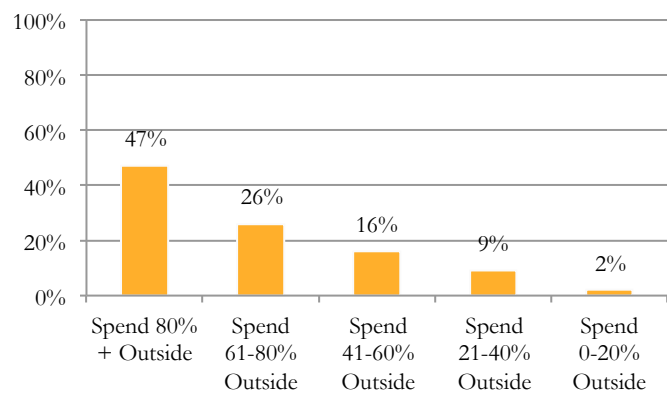
Lexington residents indicated they do the vast majority of their restaurant spending outside of Lexington Center. The weighted average among respondents indicates close to 70% of restaurant expenditures are made outside the Center.

This may point to potential market opportunity for additional restaurants in the Center. While we have to assume that residents will continue to patronize restaurants in other locations near where they work, have friends, or seek out destination eateries, it might be possible to capture more expenditures locally if the right offerings were available.

This is also supported by the fact that survey respondents reported a low satisfaction level with the current selection of selection restaurants.

Figure 25.

Portion of Restaurant Spending that Residents do Outside of Lexington Center



5. Customer Satisfaction with Lexington Center Features

A strong majority of users expressed satisfaction with the cleanliness and physical appearance of Lexington Center (90% and 73% respectively). Users are also satisfied with the public space/seating areas - 64% of survey respondents said they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied”; 18% are neutral and only 18% expressed dissatisfaction.

The other features received average ratings in the “neutral “ range. Many more users are satisfied with the availability of parking (50%) than are dissatisfied (27%); the remaining 18% are neutral. The same is true for Public Transportation and Bicycle Safety and Amenities – more users are satisfied than dissatisfied (36% and 20% and 37% and 26%, respectively).

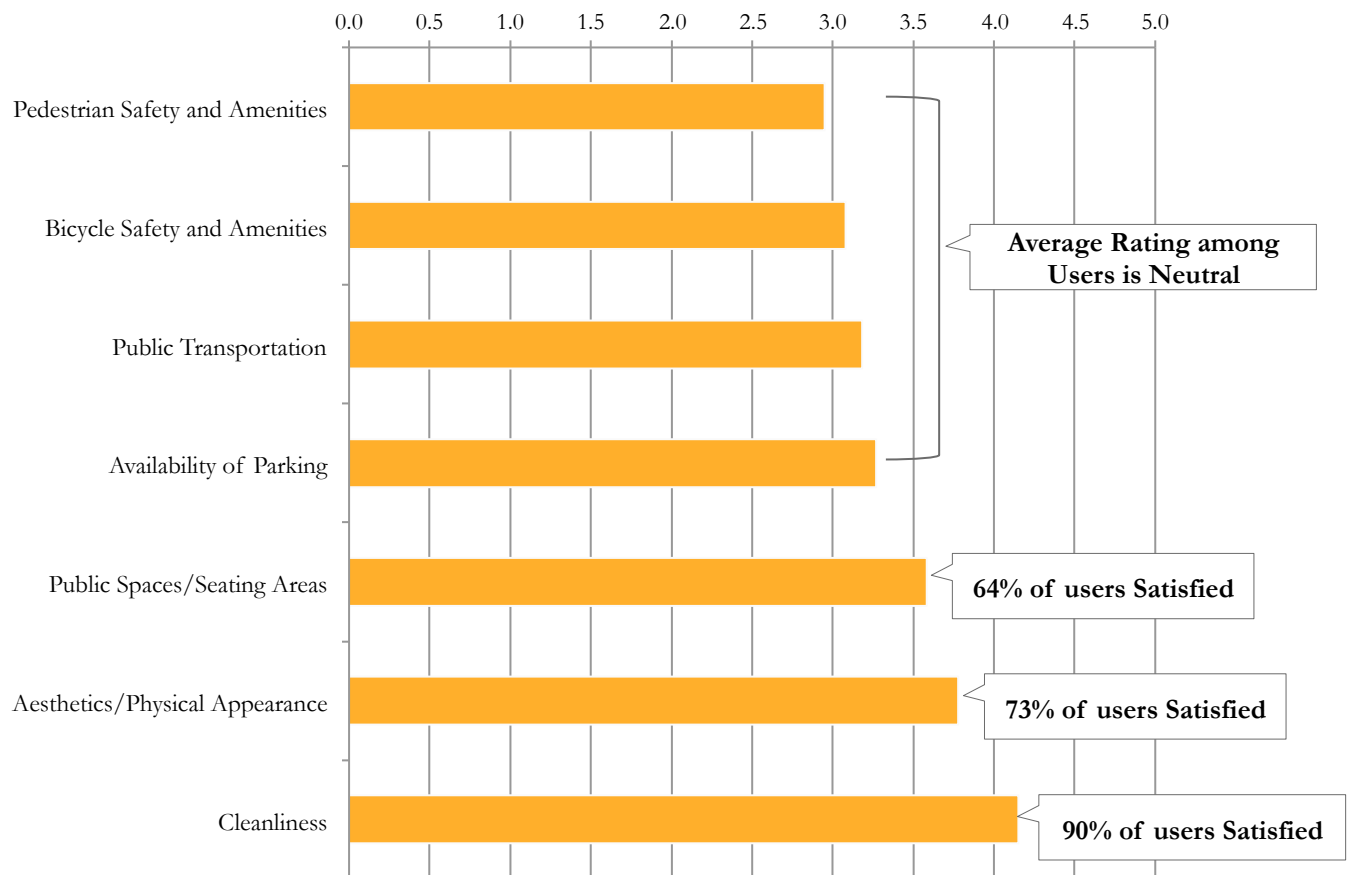
Respondents were more evenly split when it comes to pedestrian safety – 42% were satisfied and 40% were dissatisfied. We received 50 -60 comments from survey respondents about the need for more visible crosswalks (e.g., improved markings, alert lights, etc.) and additional traffic calming /management in the Center.

Figure 26.

Consumer Satisfaction Level – Features of Lexington Center

(weighted average, all responses)

(1 =Very Dissatisfied, 2=Dissatisfied, 3=Neutral, 4= Satisfied, 5 =Very Satisfied)



5. Customer Satisfaction with Lexington Center Features (cont'd)

We asked survey respondents to identify Lexington Center's best feature. The major themes that came up most often are described below in order of frequency.

1. **Aesthetic Appeal, Charm, Town/Village Center Feel** (over 75 write-ins)
 2. **Walkability, Wide Sidewalks, Pedestrian Environment** (over 75 write-ins)
 3. **Green Space, Parks, Seating Areas** (over 70 write-ins)
 4. **Businesses (restaurants, coffee shops, ice cream, movie theater)** (over 50 write-ins)
 5. **The Library** (over 40 write-ins)
 6. **History, Historic Sites** (over 40 write-ins)
 7. **The Bikeway** (over 20 write-ins)
-

D. Input Concerning Potential Future Actions

1. Events and Cultural Activities Hosted in Lexington Center

64% of Lexington Center users would like to see more community events and cultural activities hosted in the Center. The type of events that received the highest amount of support are listed below. More than 50% of the respondents are in favor of these type of activities.

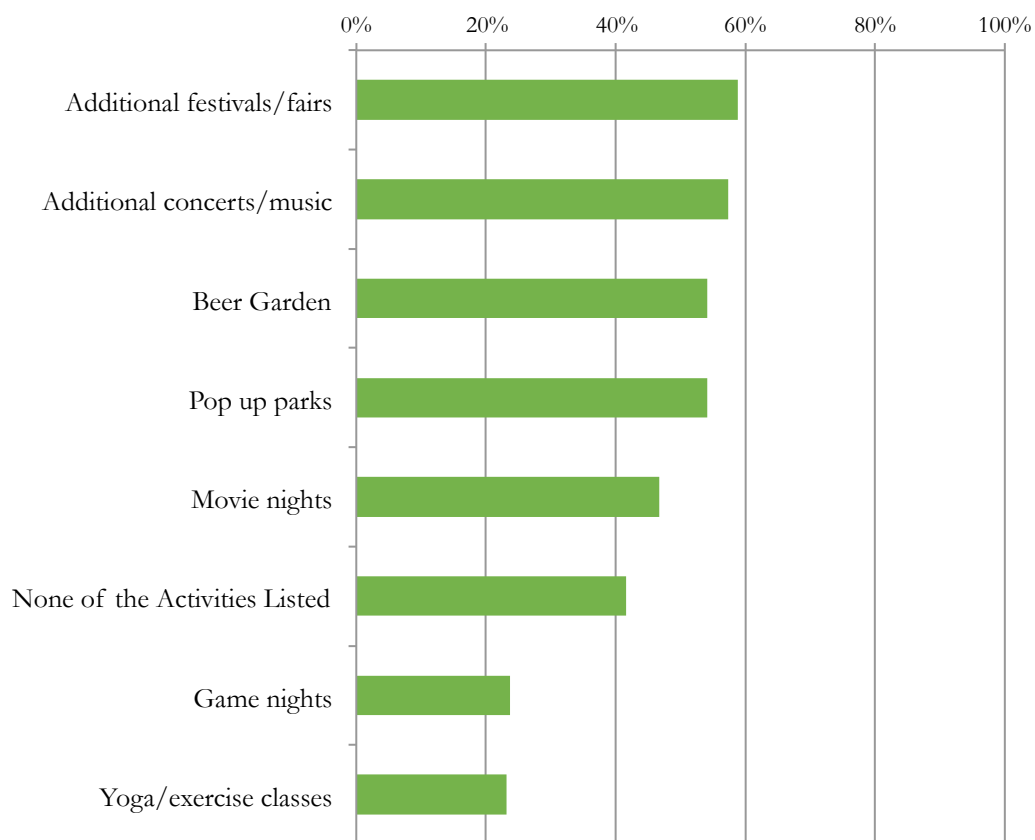
1. Additional Festivals/Fairs
2. Additional Concerts, Music
3. Beer Garden
4. Pop-up Parks

Additional suggestions for events suggested by multiple participants include:

1. Food truck festivals/more food truck nights, and
2. Pop-up shopping events.

Figure 27.

Events/Cultural Activities that Users would like to see Hosted in Lexington Center

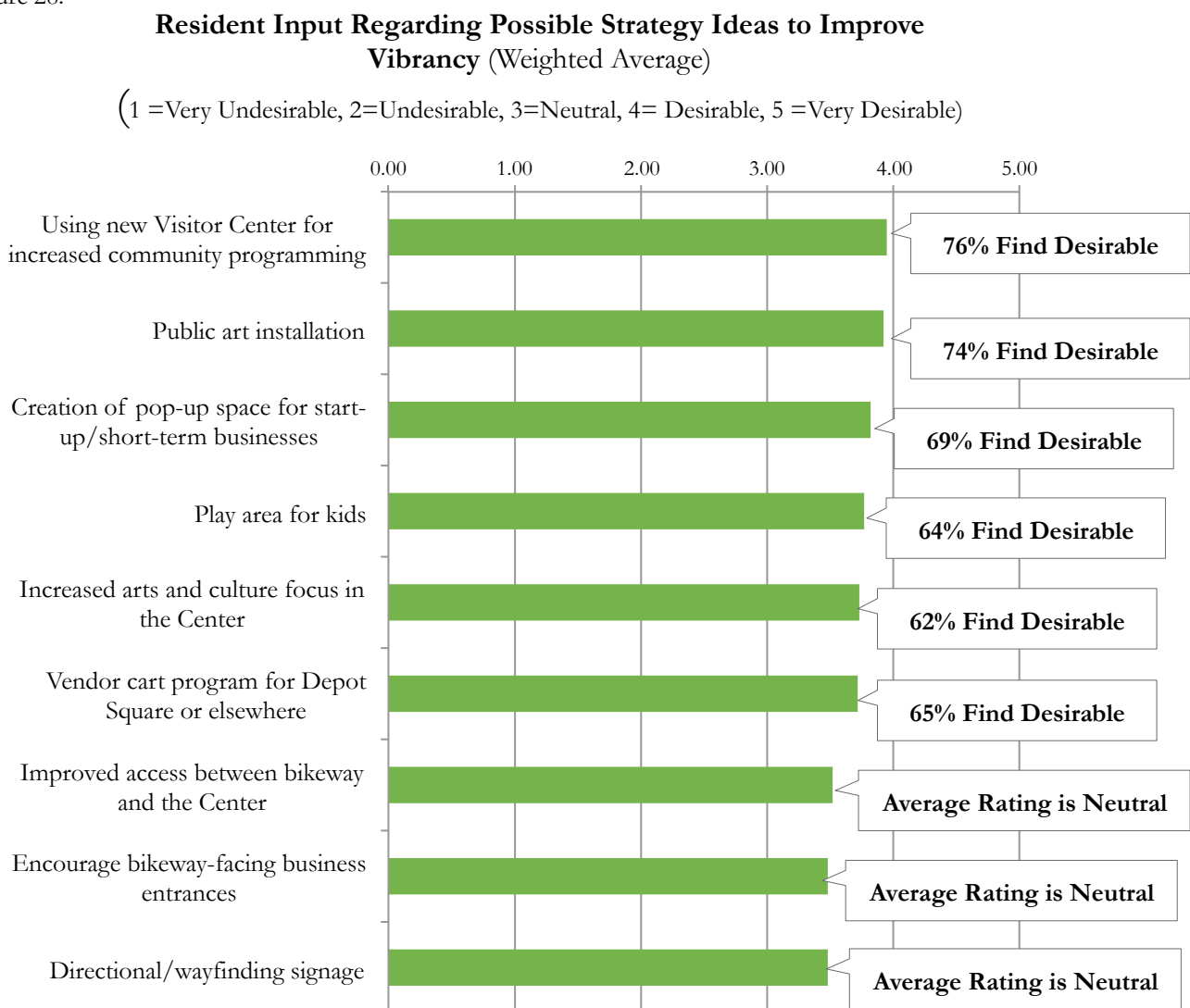


2. Possible Strategy Ideas to Improve Vibrancy

Lexington Center users are supportive of most of the proposed strategy ideas to improve vibrancy. A majority of users are in favor of the following strategy ideas.

1. Using New Visitor Center for Increased Community Programming
2. Public Art Installation
3. Creation of Pop-up Space for Start-ups /short-term business
4. Play Area for Kids
5. Increased Arts & Culture Focus in the Center
6. Vendor Cart Program for Depot Square or Elsewhere

Figure 28.



Part IV. Summary of Proposed Goals, Related Findings and Potential Strategies/ Actions for Consideration

The following goals and suggested potential strategies are intended to provide Lexington with the beginning of a plan to improve the Center. These suggestions are not intended to be comprehensive but rather help to inspire additional ideas and further vetting to determine the most appropriate course of action.

Summary of Proposed Goals

Goal 1:

Attract new businesses/uses that residents want in the Center, especially those that: 1) increase the variety of offerings, 2) draw customer volume that might patronize other businesses, 3) provide a unique “experience” for customers, and 4) are open nights and weekends.

Goal 2:

Address factors potentially inhibiting new small businesses from locating/thriving in the Center.

Goal 3:

Support existing businesses by: 1) increasing foot traffic in the Center, 2) increasing awareness of the businesses, 3) promoting “buy local”, and 4) addressing obstacles.

Goal 4:

Expand the number and type of activities/events in the Center to reinforce the image as a “social place/ community center”, increase users and potential customer base.

Goal 5:

Address vacant storefronts; prevent long-term vacancies.

Goal 6:

Increase efforts to promote and support tourism and recreation visitors.

Goal 7:

Increase arts and culture focus in the Center.

Goal 8:

Encourage expanding offerings for youth and families in the Center.

Goal 9:

Ensure the pedestrian/streetscape environment is safe, inviting and comfortable for customers while also supportive of business activity.

Goals with related Findings and Potential Strategies to follow . . .

Goal 1: Attract new businesses/uses that residents want in the Center, especially those that:
1) increase the variety of offerings, 2) draw customer volume that might patronize other businesses, 3) provide a unique “experience”, and 4) are open nights and weekends.

Related Findings:

- Even though most of the establishments in Lexington Center are independently-owned single location businesses, residents responding to our survey frequently mentioned wanting more small, independent, unique businesses in the Center.
- 68% of consumers are dissatisfied with the selection of retail stores and 50% are dissatisfied with the selection of restaurants. Lexington residents reported doing less than 30% of their annual restaurant spending in the Center which may point to an opportunity for additional eateries.
- There are several existing business clusters in the Center. New businesses might be able to feed off customer traffic from existing businesses and complement/expand these clusters. Examples include:

Crossover and Comparative Clusters

- Restaurants and Entertainment
- Errands and Personal Services

Market Segment Clusters

- Wellness, Fitness & Recreation
- Visitors/Tourists
- Children/Families

- Comparison with other commercial centers may lead to business prospects for recruitment.
 - Establishment types often found in downtowns that are not present in Lexington Center include:
 - ☒ Wider variety of restaurants (e.g., American pub style, Mexican, Breakfast), restaurants with entertainment
 - ☒ Food & beverage stores (grocery, liquor, specialty foods)
 - ☒ Pet goods/services
 - Compared to downtowns with significant tourism, the Center has less gift/jewelry/specialty shops.
- Recruitment efforts should highlight the Center’s top business location advantages identified by current businesses (central location, demographics of Lexington households, attractive historic center, many food options and proximity to bikeway).

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Vendor cart program for Depot Square or elsewhere (supported by 64% of businesses and 65% of consumers)
- Creation of pop-up space for start-up/ short-term businesses in vacant/under utilized storefronts (supported by 69% of businesses and 69% of residents). Facilitate pop-ups in privately-owned space by developing a “pop-up policy” to minimize hindrances.
- See also “retail/small business incentive program” under “Goal 2: Address factors potentially inhibiting small businesses”

Goal 2: Address factors potentially inhibiting new small businesses from locating/thriving in the Center.

Related Findings:

- High cost of occupancy for businesses (rents and taxes)
 - Our findings indicate that rents and tax rates are generally higher in Lexington Center compared to most of the surrounding and comparison communities. This may pose a competitive disadvantage especially for recruiting small independent businesses. (Property tax rates are a factor for tenants not just property owners; the wide-spread use of triple net leases directly transfers the tax burden.)
 - The biggest complaint from the business owners regarding business operation in Lexington Center is the high cost of occupancy (rent and taxes). 49% of all businesses responding to our survey expressed dissatisfaction with rent/leasing cost in the Center. 64% of the retail and restaurants expressed dissatisfaction.
- Regulatory Concerns - In conversations with business and real estate representatives, we heard people say that the time to get through the regulatory process for renovating or building out a space is longer in Lexington than other communities. This perception could be discouraging to new businesses. We also heard comments specifically about signage restrictions and the potentially lengthy process for new signage requiring approvals from groups that do not meet frequently (Historic District).

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Retail/small business incentive program for target business types (that meet specified criteria)
 - Tax rebate/subsidy program to effectively lower taxes for properties rented to businesses in a way that the tax savings would transfer to the tenants.
 - Some variation of a rent subsidy program similar to the program implemented in Taunton where a partial subsidy is provided for businesses that meet specified criteria.
 - Some version of a small business loan program similar to program implemented in Beverly that provides small low interest loans to target businesses.
- Review and ensure signage, zoning, licensing and other regulations allow and promote desired uses and take into account identified issues. Determine if approval processes can be streamlined/shortened.
- Use professional design services to provide examples for signage that meet requirements and is highly visible including at night. Consider assisting with procurement for approved lighting.
- See also other strategies listed under “Goal 3: Support existing businesses”

Goal 3: Support existing businesses by: 1) increasing foot traffic in the Center, 2) increasing awareness of the businesses, 3) promoting “buy local”, and 4) addressing obstacles.

Related Findings:

- Lexington Center benefits the community by offering goods and services, functioning as a social gathering place and serving as a major employment center, deserving of economic development efforts to support existing businesses. The Center has an estimated 1,500+ employees (half full-time and half part-time) which, in aggregate, makes it Lexington’s third largest employer.
- Almost half of the business respondents (49%) feel that the business climate in Lexington Center has declined in the last 3 years.
- On the positive side, 12% of the businesses are considering increasing staff and 12% are considering expanding operations. On a less positive note, 12% are considering moving out of the Center and 10% are considering closing or selling the business.
- Approximately half of the businesses (53%) are satisfied with their current business location. 30% are neutral on the subject and 16% are dissatisfied. While the majority are satisfied, this isn’t a ringing endorsement. The Center may be at risk for losing the businesses that are dissatisfied as well as some portion of neutral businesses if other location options become available.
- 50% of the retail and restaurant businesses responding to our survey expressed dissatisfaction with the foot traffic/volume of customers coming to the Center.
- The restaurants in the Center account for the highest weekly customer counts and consumers reported restaurants and the library as the most common reasons for visiting the Center. Promoting the Center through restaurants and the library, both would likely have the largest impact.
- Many businesses in the Center (approximately one-third) currently supplement their through-the-door sales with on-line sales. In some cases, this strategy can help keep desired products and services available to residents and visitors while using online sales to help maintain the cost of the location. This is a strategy that should be promoted and encouraged.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Increase foot traffic through increased community events and promotional strategies (see Goal 4).
- Take measures to make business owners and customers more aware of longer-term parking options available. (We received comments about the 2 hour parking meter limitation including a reminder that the average chemical hair service takes 2.5 – 3 hours).
- Encourage and make it easier for small businesses in the Center to offer live music, coffee house singers, open mic nights and other entertainment to incentivize customers to dine local, help increase foot traffic and extend customer visit time in the Center. Consider removing the license requirement associated with entertainment under specified conditions (e.g., Boston’s Acoustic Live Entertainment Ordinance for Businesses in Main Street Districts), or alternatively, at least consider not increasing the fee for a license.
- Launch a "Buy Local" promotional campaign (possibly in association with/ through the library).
- Encourage/facilitate omni-channel marketing to help businesses supplement their through-the-door sales.

Goal 4: Expand the number and type of activities/events in Lexington Center to reinforce the image as a “social place/community center”, increase users and potential customer base.

Related Findings:

- 79% of businesses and 64% of consumers responding to our survey support “more community events hosted in the Center”.
- More than 50% of the consumer respondents are in favor of the following types of activities.
 - Additional Festivals/Fairs
 - Additional Concerts, Music
 - Beer Garden
 - Pop-up Parks
- Additional suggestions for events suggested by multiple respondents include:
 - Food truck festivals/more food truck nights, and
 - Pop-up shopping events.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Use new Visitor Center for increased community programming (supported by 79% of consumers)
- Strategies used by other communities to coordinate/encourage/manage events include:
 - Town-funded events/cultural coordinator (e.g., Montague/RiverCulture, Pittsfield)
 - RFP process and small grants for event producers (e.g., Union Square Main Streets) to increase events without over-burdening town-staff with event orchestration
 - Designated Events Committee
- Recurring arts/business events (e.g., "First Fridays", "First Thursdays" - Jamaica Plain Center)
- Consider using an App (e.g., StriveOn) to create scavenger hunts

Goal 5: Address vacant storefronts; prevent long-term vacancies.

Related Findings:

- At the time of the inventory (August 2019), there were 4 vacant commercial units in the Center. One of these is a highly visible corner location that has been vacant for quite some time.
- There are also a number of “occupied vacancies” – meaning first floor core locations occupied with uses that might not largely contribute to the overall vibrancy of the Center (e.g., not open full time regular hours, don’t attract foot traffic)

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Consider implementing a Vacant Storefront Bylaw - require property owners to pay a fee to register vacant spaces and describe the efforts they are making to fill the space. Fee can be waived under certain conditions (e.g., art installation, pop-up use). (This was successfully implemented in Arlington.)
- See also “Facilitate pop-ups in privately owned space” under Goal 1: Attract New Businesses” and “Small business incentive program” under “Goal 2: Address factors potentially inhibiting small businesses”

Goal 6: Increase efforts to promote and support tourism and recreation visitors.

Related Findings:

- Approximately one-half of the businesses benefit from tourism/recreation visitors while the other half (49%) reported no impact. 30% of the businesses estimated that tourists account for between 2 and 9% of their sales. 12% of the businesses estimated that tourists represent between 10 and 29%. The few establishments that reported tourists accounting for 50% or more of their sales are specifically targeted to visitors (e.g., Visitor Center/Trolley, Historical Society).
- 58% of the businesses support the idea of increased tourism promotion.
- The town currently does not have any special permitting or license arrangements with the bus companies, however there is designated bus parking near Battle Green (a bit removed from the prime commercial area). This arrangement leads to unpredictability of schedules and missed opportunities to make tour customers more aware of what else the center has to offer.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Improve access between Minuteman Bikeway and the Center (supported by 56% of businesses)
- Encourage bikeway-facing business entrances (supported by 58% of businesses).
- Directional/wayfinding signage (supported by 63% of businesses) that could be tied in with and image and branding campaign for the Center
- Vendor Cart Program for Depot Square/elsewhere (as previously noted)
- Consider using an App (e.g., StriveOn) for historic site/walking tour.
- Consider developing a licensing agreement/partnership with the large tour bus companies to help promote the design of routes, duration and location of stops that could benefit Center businesses along with the coordination of other efforts to make customers more aware of the Center’s offerings.

Goal 7: Increase arts and culture focus in the Center.

Related Findings:

- 65% of businesses and 62% of consumers responding to our survey support “increased focus on arts and culture in the Center”.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Public art installation (supported by 74% of consumers). The Commonwealth Places is a statewide program that can help fund community-driven projects such as art installations, pocket parks, etc. through a crowdfunding platform with the incentive of a dollar-for-dollar funding match.
- Encourage additional events at Cary Hall to maximize use of the facility, expand entertainment offerings and reinforce the Center’s image as a cultural center, and bring in additional customers.

Goal 8: Encourage expanding offerings for youth and families in the Center.

Related Findings:

- Lexington is a community with a high percentage of families with children and large households but there seems to be some missed opportunity to engage the Center with young people and families. More than 1 out of every 4 residents in Lexington (26%) is under the age of 18.
- Many respondent offered comments about the desirability of “family-friendly dining”.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Provide a play area for kids in the Center (supported by 64% of consumers)
- Recruit businesses/uses in the Center that serve youth and families.

Goal 9: Ensure the pedestrian/streetscape environment is safe, inviting and comfortable for customers while also supportive of business activity.

Related Findings:

- Most businesses (74%) and consumers (64%) are satisfied with public spaces/seating areas.
- The average rating for pedestrian safety and amenities among business and consumer survey respondents fell in the neutral range. However, some people were clearly less than satisfied – we received 50 – 60 “write-in” comments about the need for safer/better street crossing. Many people talked about the need for more visible crosswalks; some commented on the fact that there were so many crosswalks.
- We received a few comments from businesses that mentioned the planned streetscape improvement project and need for more communication.

Potential Strategies/Actions:

- Assess the need for improvements to crosswalks to increase visibility (e.g., improved markings, alert lights, etc.).
- Ensure adequate communication with business owners about the planned streetscape improvement project and how business interruption might be minimized.